



Organization of the Relief Society

Painting by Dale Kilbourn

In 1842 in Nauvoo, Illinois, a small group of the women of the Church felt the need to be formally organized in the Lord's service. Eliza R. Snow wrote a constitution and submitted it to the Prophet Joseph Smith for approval.

After admiring this constitution, the Prophet stated: "But this is not what you want. Tell the sisters their offering is accepted of the Lord, and He has

something better for them than a written constitution. Invite them all to meet me and a few of the brethren in the Masonic Hall over my store next Thursday afternoon, and I will organize the sisters under the priesthood after a pattern of the priesthood." He later said, "The Church was never perfectly organized until the women were thus organized." ("Story of the Organization of the Relief Society," Relief Society Magazine 6:129.) "And this Society shall rejoice, and knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time henceforth." (History of the Church 4:607.)

At the Prophet's request, eighteen women met on March 17, 1842. The painting depicts this first meeting of the Relief Society. Seated at the left is the

Prophet Joseph Smith. Also in attendance were two members of the Council of the Twelve Apostles—Willard Richards, seated at the right, and John Taylor, later third president of the Church, standing. Emma Smith, wife of the Prophet, was unanimously elected president and is shown addressing the women.

The "Female Relief Society" was organized "to seek out and relieve the distressed—that each member should be ambitious to do good." (Minutes of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, March 17, 1842, p. 13.)

The artist, Dale Kilbourn of Salt Lake City, completed the painting in 1971. It now hangs in the Relief Society room of the Nauvoo Visitors Center.

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